

Crystal Magnets Piano Duo • Bio Release

Andy Milne & Benoît Delbecq

Crystal Magnets — the piano duo from two masters of contemporary improvisation— reunites Canadian Andy Milne and Frenchman Benoît Delbecq. They became friends in 1990 while studying with saxophonist Steve Coleman at the Banff International Workshop for Jazz & Creative Music. Both keyboardists took Coleman’s teachings to heart, exploring distinctly different approaches to expressing their experiences through music.

In 2007, they received The French-America Jazz Exchange and were commissioned by Chamber Music America to develop and record “Where is Pannonica?” [Songlines – 2009.] Milne and Delbecq returned to The Banff Centre in January 2008 to undertake this project. The scope of it grew to include extensive collaboration with Banff Centre audio engineers throughout the composition, recording and mixing phases. Using the sonic landscape of the 5.0 surround sound format for inspiration, the music was composed in part to exploit the unique potential for placing specific compositional elements in distinct regions of the mix. The engineers created an acoustic array within each piano and analyzed the natural acoustics to define a larger array within the room, enabling Milne and Delbecq to compose for the medium and perform in harmony with their environment. The **New York Times** lauded the recording as a “strangely beautiful new album” from two “resourcefully contemporary pianists, both drawn to quixotic interrogations of harmony and timbre.”

Although Milne and Delbecq have both created music for electronic and computer-based instruments, Crystal Magnets is primarily an acoustic piano duo, equally influenced by both pianists’ ever-expanding experiences and passions. As an innovator in improvised, prepared-piano performance, Delbecq has synthesized sounds and concepts from Ligeti and Steve Lacy to Aka Pygmy music. Milne’s long association with Steve Coleman inspired his unique integration of rhythmic concepts from Cuba, Ghana, jazz, funk and hip-hop.

Their shared respect and understanding for each others’ approach to the piano and to improvisation, helped connect them in a profound, almost seamless thought process throughout their collaboration. While interpreting each others’ compositions and collaboratively developing pieces, Milne and Delbecq discovered this synchronicity and used it with great care to develop complex rhythmic, melodic and harmonic relationships involving timbre and texture, room acoustics, space, and time. In doing so, they have extended the scope of the piano duo within the jazz world. The duo has performed in festivals and concerts in Canada, the US and France, and has also appeared on television. In 2014, they joined forces with two koto players and an animator, forming Strings & Serpents, which premiered at Lincoln Center in 2015.

- **Andy Milne** has been an important and respected figure on the New York jazz scene for over 30 years. He has released 13 recordings as a leader or co-leader, actively composing for orchestra, chamber ensembles, and scoring for film and television. A fearless, versatile explorer, Milne collaborates with dancers, visual artists, poets and musicians spanning jazz, classical, pop, folk, and world music. At the piano he skillfully blends poetic gravitas with a playful sense of order. A former student of Oscar Peterson, Milne draws inspiration from politics, philosophy, homeopathy,

comedy, and science fiction, with musical influences that bridge Thelonious Monk, Art Tatum, Herbie Nichols, Bela Bartok, Gustav Mahler, Joni Mitchell and Stevie Wonder.

Milne has recorded and toured throughout the world with Ravi Coltrane, Ralph Alessi, Carlos Ward and Carla Cook, and has collaborated with a range of artists including Andrew Cyrille, Sekou Sundiata, Avery Brooks, Bruce Cockburn, Fred Hersch, Ben Monder, Dianne Reeves, Jen Shyu, Tyshawn Sorey and Jamie Baum. During the 1990s, he was at the center of the M-BASE Collective as a core member of saxophonist Steve Coleman's bands, as well as performing with Cassandra Wilson and Greg Osby. After a formative apprenticeship with Coleman, Milne moved to conquer his own musical frontiers, eventually forming his longstanding quintet Dapp Theory in 1998. He is the recipient of numerous awards, commissions, and a Yamaha Artist. In addition to his multiple projects, Milne is sought after educator, serving as a tenured Associate Professor of Music at The University of Michigan.

Benoît Delbecq figures today among the innovators of the international contemporary jazz scene. His reputation and influence have continued to grow steadily since the early 90's. The New York Times describes him as "*an original and unconventional pianist who expertly invents a serene music.*" An inspired adventurer and pioneer of prepared piano, Delbecq often uses electronics to recycle his own musical statements. He performs solo piano and solo electronics, leads or co-leads a number of bands from duos to quintets, and is involved in many multi-disciplinary productions of theater, dance, visual arts and film.

Delbecq's international profile took off in 1992 following appearances at the cutting-edge Parisian club Les Instants Chavirés. In parallel he founded Kartet, The Recyclers and the Hask Collective, all of which helped revitalize the Paris creative music scene. Delbecq has toured around the globe, released 38 CDs as a leader or as part of a collective, and frequently collaborates with a wide range of European and American artists. His 2013 Songlines release, "Fun House," featuring his double trio with pianist Fred Hersch, was highly acclaimed, making the *Best of 2013* lists for New York City Jazz Record and JazzMan Magazine. In 2010, his releases, "The Sixth Jump" and "Circles and Calligrams" both received the *Grand Prix International du Disque Charles Cros* and were listed as one the ten albums of the year by the New York Times and Le Monde. His music features mesmerizing grooves that reveal the sparkle of lunar melodies - an invitation to a voyage into a magic land.

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